

HP and 'A' team's preps hampered

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh High Performance (HP) unit had been holding a joint training camp with the 'A' side under the Bangladesh Tigers programme in Chattogram. The camp was designed both as a conditioning phase ahead of domestic competitions and as preparation for the upcoming Top End T20 tournament and a four-day match in Australia. However, the preparations have been significantly disrupted by persistent rainfall.

The camp began with 28 players travelling to Chattogram in June. Over the past one and a half months, sources said that only 23 to 24 days of practice sessions or match-scenario training were possible at the Bir Shrestha Shahid Ruhul Amin Stadium. Even during those limited sessions, interruptions were frequent, resulting in sporadic training routines.

It was learnt that even the practice matches faced challenges. The first of these matches, held on Thursday, was played in poor conditions and

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turned out to be a low-scoring affair. Friday's fixture fared no better, being interrupted by rain after just three overs.

"There was a lot of rain and since both teams – HP and the 'A' side – are here, we tried to balance priorities by using the indoor nets, given that they'll soon be travelling to Australia," said a source from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

BCB's chairman of cricket operations, Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, visited Chattogram yesterday to assess the preparations first-hand and addressed the media about the interruptions.

"In the past few days, whenever the HP or A team practised here, there were certainly interruptions. When rain interferes, indoor facilities are the only option for practice, but unfortunately, the indoor facilities were not functional. That hampered our training sessions – and this cannot be denied. We have to accept that," Fahim told reporters on Friday.

Seven players from the HP squad have been included in the 'A' side's preparations for the upcoming tour of Australia. Tofael Ahmed, Rakibul Hasan, Jishan Ahmed, Ripon Mondol, and Mahfuzur Rahman are among the cricketers earmarked for the tour. National team pacer Hasan Mahmud is also under consideration for the Australia tour.

"The final team has not been announced yet, so we can't say definitively whether he is going or not. But since he is here at the camp, it's clear he is in the plans [to tour Australia with the 'A' side]," Fahim said.



PHOTO: REUTERS

England pacer Gus Atkinson celebrates his fourth five-wicket haul in Tests after he wrapped up the Indian innings for just 224 in 69.4 overs by nicking off Prasidh Krishna in the first session on Day 2 of the fifth Test at The Oval on Friday. England openers Ben Duckett (43) and Zak Crawley (64) raced off to 92-0 before the Indian pacers came back strongly, reducing England to 215-7 at Tea.

Proposed two-tier system a test for Bangladesh

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

How Test cricket can be saved is a question that has been pondered upon for over a century, and since 2016, the ICC has seemingly made up its mind on the solution: dividing the teams in two tiers.

That year, the world cricket's governing body pushed to establish a two-tier system, with seven teams in the top flight and the remaining five in the bottom.

Reportedly, six teams had even agreed, however, the plans fell through due to opposition from others, most significantly India's.

Around nine years after that failure, the ICC is once again pushing for it, this time proposing to equally split the 12 teams into two groups of six.

Interestingly, this time the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) is seemingly leading the charge as the current ICC chairman Jay Shah and chief executive Sanjog Gupta both hail from India.

The proposal was discussed in the ICC's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Singapore held from July 17-20, and even though some teams opposed it, especially Pakistan, an eight-member working group was formed to test its viability.

World cricket is seemingly split at the proposal, with some terming it a necessity to keep the format relative while others say it is a blatant cash-grab.

And amid all the debate, Bangladesh's future as a top-tier cricketing nation – at least on paper – hangs in a limbo.

For and against
Cricket Australia (CA) and England and



PHOTO: AI GENERATED

Wales Cricket Board (ECB), the other two boards alongside the BCCI in cricket's supposed 'big three', support the move, their main incentive being that it would open the door for two bilateral series in every three years between these three sides.

The youngest Test sides in Ireland and Afghanistan also are reportedly for the tier system as it would open up more playing opportunities for them in red-ball cricket.

The position of teams like current World Test Champions South Africa, New Zealand, Sri Lanka is not clear but the former two could financially benefit from this move.

Meanwhile, teams like Bangladesh, Pakistan, West Indies, and Zimbabwe, all ranked below the top six in Tests, stand to lose the most from this change.

The invisible tiers
There is already an invisible tier in place in

Tests, as the top sides hardly ever play the weaker teams.

Bangladesh, in its near 25-year-long history in Test cricket, have only played six Tests against Australia, and toured them only once for a Test series in 2003.

The Tigers have played just four Tests in England, the last time being in 2010, and have played only five Tests in India.

Zimbabwe have faced a similar neglect and the newest additions Afghanistan and Ireland are hardly getting any matches, having played just 11 and 10 Tests respectively since attaining Test status in 2017.

The argument used by the big three nations is that matches against weaker teams would not be as competitive. But by that logic, England have no business heading to Australia for the next Ashes, having not won a Test Down Under in their last 15 attempts.

Bangladesh's fate
Although there remains many challenges in implementing the two-tier system, if it does end up happening, Bangladesh, who are currently ranked ninth, are certain to start at the second tier, which would be detrimental to the Tigers' progress in the format.

But for now, the BCB is playing the waiting game.

"[In the ICC AGM] many did not agree to the decision to form a two-tier system... Till now, we just know about the committee being formed and perhaps in the next meeting an update will come," a BCB official told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

Khalid Jamil named India coach

AFP, New Delhi

Former India player Khalid Jamil was on Friday appointed coach of the struggling national men's football team, a month after Spain's Manolo Marquez stepped down following poor results.

Jamil, 48, was preferred over England's Stephen Constantine and Stefan Tarkovic of Slovakia, the All India Football Federation (AIFF) said in a statement.

AIFF committee members, including president Kalyan Chaubey, said they believed that Indian coaches "need to be given a fair chance to prove themselves".

Jamil is the first Indian to coach the senior national team in 13 years after Savio Medeira led the side from 2011 to 2012.

Kuwait-born Jamil, a former midfielder who appeared in 40 international matches for India between 1998 and 2006, has been coaching local Indian club Jamshedpur F.C.

A few members of the AIFF executive committee discussed having Constantine back at the helm but Jamil was regarded a better option as "he has been working with Indian players on a regular basis".



'Emotional' Yu celebrates historic world medal

AFP, Singapore

China's Yu Zidi said she felt "quite emotional" after the 12-year-old became the youngest swimmer in history to win a world championships medal.

Yu swam in the heats of the women's 4x200m freestyle relay but missed Thursday's final as China claimed bronze behind Australia and the United States in Singapore.

Yu, who was competing in the women's 200m butterfly final on Thursday – finishing fourth – received a medal as a member of the Chinese relay team.

"It feels quite emotional, it's a nice feeling," she said.

Yu has turned heads with her performances in Singapore.

She qualified for Monday's 200m individual medley final and finished fourth, missing out on a medal by just 0.06sec in what is not considered her strongest event.

She followed that up with another fourth in the 200m butterfly final and will also compete in the 400m individual medley.

Yu, who turns 13 in October, discovered swimming at age six as a way to cool off during China's roasting summers.

She has drawn historical comparisons to Denmark's Inge Sorensen, who at 12 was the youngest ever winner of an Olympic swimming medal with bronze at the Berlin Games of 1936.

'Table tennis needs structural overhaul'

ANISUR RAHMAN

Bangladesh Table Tennis Federation (BTTF) general secretary Maksud Ahmed Sonnet has attributed the national teams' dismal performance in the recently concluded South Asian Regional Championship in Nepal to a lack of fitness, structure, and proper planning, saying the sport remains confined within the walls of a wooden-floored stadium with no support facilities.

Both the men's and women's teams finished at the bottom of the five-nation event, which also served as qualifiers for the World Teams Table Tennis Championship. Sonnet, who accompanied the teams in Kathmandu, said the outcome was not unexpected.

"It was not unexpected, and the players deserved the results. We initially decided not to send the team but later revised our decision so that we and the players could realise where we actually stand," Sonnet told The Daily Star.

He accepted full responsibility on behalf of himself and the federation, highlighting the lack of an existing system when he took over. "There wasn't even access to the previous general secretary's email account. I had to start from scratch," he said.

Sonnet identified physical fitness,



especially in the women's team, as a major weakness. "They may have technical skills, but without fitness, it's impossible to apply those in matches," he said. In contrast, he felt the men's team had potential, particularly Mohutasin Ahmed Ridoy, who he considered the best South Asian paddler after the Indians. However, inconsistent participation in the training camp – with Ridoy missing it entirely – hampered their performance.

He pointed to the team's comparatively better performance in the 2023 Asian Championship in China, where Bangladesh finished ahead of most South Asian nations. "Back then, there was a continuous camp. This year we started late, on May 27, and did not mandate players to stay at camp full-

time. Plus, there were no preparatory matches or domestic tournaments, so the gap showed," he said.

The BTTF general secretary stressed the urgent need for proper infrastructure and planning. "There's no physio centre, no gym, and the training venue lacks air conditioning. Players undergo six hours of daily training, but less than half of it is effective due to poor conditions. We also lack player accommodation."

To address these issues, Sonnet revealed plans to appoint a coach from Thailand on August 3, following unsuccessful attempts to secure a Chinese coach. He also announced the launch of a national youth tournament across four age categories – U-11, U-13, U-15, and U-17 – and pledged to regularise domestic events such as the Federation Cup, national league, and ranking tournaments.

He underscored the importance of reviving club culture. "Table tennis used to be vibrant at the club level – Swamibagh, Armanitola, Young Pegasus – but it has faded. Without club-level engagement, we can't improve."

Responding to recent disputes over team selection, Sonnet confirmed that trials will now be mandatory before any international tournament. "No team will be sent abroad without selection trials based on national rankings," he said.



PHOTO: BFF

Members of the Bangladesh under-23 football team pose for a group photograph after reporting at the camp in Baridhara yesterday evening. Only 19 members, including USA-based Zayyan Ahmed who appeared in the three-day open trial in June, have been called up for the camp. According to the BFF, players from Abahani and Bashundhara Kings will be called up after their respective AFC assignments while three more foreign-based players will join later. Bangladesh are in Group C of the qualifiers alongside hosts Vietnam, Yemen and Singapore. The qualifiers will be held from September 3 to 9.